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Senate Bill 1137, *An Act Concerning the Connecticut Competitiveness Council*

Jeanette Bailey-Spence
71 Lawton Rd
Manchester, CT 06042
860-874-4870

To the Members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee,

My name is Jeanette Bailey-Spence. I work providing direct care with people with developmental disabilities – helping with their daily needs, social skills and life skills. I have worked at Oak Hill School for 27 years, Journey Found for 16 years, and Mosaic for 3 years. I do this work because I love to help people. Every day I strive to help people reach their full potential. However, at two of my jobs I am not making a livable wage.

I'm here today to speak in reference to Senate Bill 1137, *An Act Concerning the Connecticut Competitiveness Council*. This bill creates a committee to study how to make our state more appealing to businesses. I'm worried this is just an excuse to promote lower wages for working people like me. My personal experience – and that of thousands of other caregivers like me -- is an example why that would be a bad idea.

After 16 years at Journey Found, I am making \$13.10 per hour. After 3 years at Mosaic, I am making \$11.93 per hour. Although my pay is more at Oak Hill School, not having any raises and the cost of everything around me going up forced me to take on three jobs. If these jobs paid a livable wage, I wouldn't have to continue to work 3 jobs. We do important work, and should be paid properly for it.

The turnover at my low wage jobs is terrible. People constantly leave to seek better wages. This means the people we serve have little consistency. Continuity of care is almost extinct. They deserve to have staff who know them, and who can identify a problem just by the look on their face. If we made at least \$15 per hour, people would stay in these agencies. It would benefit everyone in this situation.

This is why the language of this bill should ensure that "business competitiveness" is about rewarding good businesses that create good jobs so people can earn a living and raise a family. It should not be about lowering wages or paying people so little they have to depend on assistance from the state. We have too much of that already.

We understand that the state of Connecticut is facing difficult choices when it comes to the budget. The DDS budget has seen over \$100 million in cuts over the last 10 years. Caregivers like me are at a breaking point. It is dire that you raise more revenue for the upcoming state budget in order to increase funding to DDS. Workers caring for the most vulnerable members of our state should be paid at least \$15 an hour.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about these issues.